

CONNECTIONS

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Early Reports Look Promising For CSDE Interdistrict Grants

EASTCONN has had some preliminary good news from the Connecticut State Department of Education regarding funding for a number of Interdistrict Grants for northeastern Connecticut schools.

“News from the state about our Interdistrict Grant funding looks promising,” said Nancy Vitale, EASTCONN’s Interdistrict Grants Manager.

Interdistrict Grant funding for 2007-2009 won’t be finalized until the close of the state Legislative session in mid-June, she said.



Interdistrict pals share a smile...

Each Interdistrict Grant program is designed to increase student awareness, understanding and appreciation of diversity.

EASTCONN recently resubmitted its existing Interdistrict Grants (plus four new ones) for funding during the state’s 2007-2009 grant cycle. The four

new Interdistrict Grants explore the areas of math, science, community service and the arts – subjects that were suggested by EASTCONN-member school districts, Vitale said.

In collaboration with its local school districts, EASTCONN received more than \$1.4 million in Interdistrict Grants in the CSDE’s 2005-2007 round of funding. Those Interdistrict programs served more than 4,500 students of all ages in 32 participating eastern Connecticut districts.

Check EASTCONN’s Web site (www.eastconn.org) in early July for an updated listing of the diverse assortment of 2007-2009 Interdistrict Grants for northeastern Connecticut’s students.

Stay tuned for details...

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Left to right: Eric Friedman, a recent Science Cadre workshop guest speaker from WGBH Teacher’s Domain, shares a laugh with EASTCONN Science Cadre members Nancy Magnani, Grace Levin and Mary Lou Smith.

Nation’s Report Card Offers Clues to New Science CMTs

Professional Development May Ease “Science Anxiety”

While next year’s science CMT has school districts scrambling to adjust their science curricula, a second, national test, which has been around for decades, may help educators figure out what to expect when Connecticut’s new science CMT arrives in classrooms next March.

Although no one knows exactly what the science CMTs will demand from students, EASTCONN’s science experts say that knowing what’s on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) will help prepare Connecticut teachers — and their students — for the science CMTs.

The NAEP, also known as “the nation’s report card,” is a rigorous test given periodically since 1969 to students in selected schools across the nation in grades 4, 8 and 12. The NAEP test varies from year to year.

In anticipation of the science CMTs, EASTCONN’s science team has created a broad variety of professional development opportunities designed to improve the quality of scientific inquiry

See **SCIENCE CMT**, page 5

Calendar of EASTCONN Events



JULY 2007

- 25 Motivating the “Plugged-In” Generation
- 25 Using Picture Books to Build Vocabulary & Teach Author’s Craft
- 30 InspireData for the Classroom for Grades 4-8
- 31 InspireData for the Classroom for Grades 9-12

AUGUST 2007

- 1 SMART Board in the Classroom
- 7 & 8 Create a School Web Site with Dreamweaver
- 8 Integrating “Author and Me” QAR Strategy Instruction into Your Reading Lessons
- 23 Getting Kids Excited About Reading: Spice It Up a Notch with Nutmeg!

SEPTEMBER 2007

- 18 Science Council
- 20 Getting Kids Excited About Reading: Spice It Up a Notch with Nutmeg!
- 21 NASA/URSA
- 27 Addressing Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Barriers to Learning within a Response to Intervention (RTI) Context
- 27, 10/25 & 12/6 First Year of Teaching Series (Twilight Series)
- 28 Developing Scientifically Literate Children: Exploration in Science Technology

Note: Workshops fill up quickly. Please reserve seats early. EASTCONN workshops are subject to change. Please e-mail the EASTCONN Conference Office at conferenceoffice@eastconn.org for more information about any of the meetings and workshops listed here. Register online for any of the above workshops at www.eastconn.org. Click on “Workshops.”

EASTCONN’s 2007 Annual Meeting



David M. Nee, Executive Director of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, joins Elizabeth Aschenbrenner, Director of EASTCONN’s Early Childhood division, during EASTCONN’s Annual Meeting at The Capitol Theater in downtown Willimantic. Nee’s keynote address to EASTCONN’s board of directors and staff highlighted the importance of early childhood education.



From left to right are ACT writers Lydia Jones, Cody Gondyke, Shelby Rhodes, Katie Paul, and Hilary Osborn.

Poetry, Prose by ACT Students Earn Kudos in Area Contests

Several ACT students have recently won area poetry contests.

Hilary Osborn, a junior at ACT, has won the 10th Annual IMPAC-CSU Young Writers competition for poetry in Windham County. Osborn took home a \$1,000 prize for her poem, “Music is a Slut,” which is described as “extremely clever and very humorous.” Osborn will now compete at the state level. Osborn, who is from Columbia, attends E.O. Smith High School.

Four other students from ACT’s creative writing program were finalists in the IMPAC-CSU competition: Cody Gondyke, a sophomore from Hampton who attends Parish Hill High School, was a finalist in the poetry category; Lydia Jones, a junior from Hampton and Parish Hill High School, in the prose category; Katie Paul, a junior from Ashford and E.O. Smith High School, for poetry; and Shelby Rhodes, a freshman from Colchester and Bacon Academy, for poetry.

ACT’s Dana Johnson, a senior from Coventry and Coventry High School, won the Windham Regional Arts Council Contest for poetry, ACT creative writing teacher Lisa Taylor said.

Anna Nassiff, another ACT creative writing student, won the Connecticut Writing Project contest for prose, according to Taylor. Nassiff’s piece, “Umbrella,” will be published in the *Connecticut Student Writers Magazine*, Taylor said. Nassiff is a freshman from Columbia. She attends Windham High School.

ACT (Arts at the Capitol Theater) is EASTCONN’s arts magnet high school, located in the renovated, historic Capitol Theater on Main Street in Willimantic.

EASTCONN Administration

Paula M. Colen, Executive Director

EASTCONN Connections

Writer/Editor: Teddie Sleight ~ tsleight@eastconn.org

Assistant: Cindy Laurendeau ~ claurendeau@eastconn.org

Communications Department

Dotty Budnick, Director

EASTCONN, 376 Hartford Turnpike, Hampton, CT 06247
860-455-0707 FAX: 860-455-0691

Four High Schools Win \$70,000 Tech Grants for New Computer-Aided Writing Pilot

Coventry, Region 19, Stafford and Windham high schools have each secured about \$70,000 in state technology grants as part of a pilot program intended to examine the effectiveness of computer-assisted writing, instruction and testing for ninth- and/or tenth-grade students.

Along with the computers and software, the CSDE grant requires the four high schools to provide professional development for teachers and to use the Web-based application *MY Access!*, which provides students with feedback and scoring through artificial intelligence (AI).

Additionally, the grant requires each district to participate in future CAPT statewide online assessment initiatives. At least 60 students must take part at each school.

“This is perfect timing for us to use this new [*MY Access!*] technology as we explore ways to improve student writing,” said Michael Bednarz, Stafford’s Director of Curriculum and Instruction, as he talked about the grant’s positive effects on Stafford High School.

Bednarz said that Stafford High School is in the midst of a major renovation that will create a new, wireless learning community within the school. In addition, the high school is already involved in Stafford’s district-wide initiative to examine best practices in writing pedagogy for all its students, Bednarz said.

Bednarz said Stafford educators will take advantage of EASTCONN’s expertise in technology as they work together to meet the grant’s requirements.

Region 19 Superintendent of Schools Bruce Silva said he is very pleased that E.O. Smith High School will participate in the grant.

“We are very excited by the potential the pilot might have to utilize a different instructional strategy to achieve higher levels of student performance. The project aligns perfectly with E.O. Smith’s achievement goals.”

— Bruce Silva, Region 19

“Our teachers will have an opportunity to pilot the use of both laptop computers and *MY Access!* software to accelerate student learning,” Silva said. “We are very excited by the potential the pilot might have to utilize a different instructional strategy to achieve higher levels of student performance. The project aligns perfectly with E.O. Smith’s achievement goals.”

EASTCONN officials said they also view the new grant as an opportunity for cross-district collaboration among the four high schools.

“It’s not just about buying and using the laptops and software for the assessment of student writing,” said Jim Huggins,

See **TECH GRANTS**, back page



Professionals representing 21 eastern Connecticut towns paid close attention during a recent Community of Practice workshop.

Community of Practice Helps Connect Isolated Colleagues

For two years, EASTCONN’s Community of Practice for Related Services has been on a mission: to share resources with their northeastern Connecticut colleagues, to provide them with professional opportunities and to ease their sense of isolation.

“So many of our districts have Related Services providers who work in relative isolation,” said Mary Jo Chretien, EASTCONN’s Related Services Group Coordinator. “So we were excited that we were able to get all these professionals together on a regular basis to share ideas.” Chretien is also a speech-language pathologist.

EASTCONN’s Community of Practice obtained a start-up grant in 2005 from the New Alliance Foundation, Chretien said. The CoP serves occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists and other professionals who work in the region’s school districts. The CoP, which meets throughout the school year, began with a core group of 15 EASTCONN Related Services professionals and has expanded to include colleagues serving school districts across EASTCONN’s 36-town region.

Chretien said EASTCONN’s CoP was established for three reasons: to help Related Services professionals obtain Continuing Education Units (CEUs); to provide a regular forum for discussing best practice and related issues; and to build a collegial network of support and shared resources.

One of the most recent workshops, *Response to Intervention – Understanding the Impact of RTI on Special Education and Related Services*, proved to be so popular that 90 Related Services providers, school psychologists and other special education teachers filled the workshop to capacity. At least 21 towns were represented.

Other workshops included *Learning Related Vision Therapy*, presented by Dr. Susan Danberg, and *Treatment of Sensory Learning* with Debra Dickson.

As she looks to the future, Chretien said that EASTCONN’s Community of Practice will continue to offer high-caliber

See **COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**, back page



A senior from Northeast Regional School proudly displays seedlings that he and fellow students have cultivated in the greenhouse that has also become a hands-on classroom.

Greenhouse Project Teaches More Than Gardening ABC's

Project-Based Curriculum Owes Much to Innovation

Thanks to a particularly innovative UConn Cooperative Extension Service agent and some ingenious, hard-working educators, a formerly vacant greenhouse at Northeast Regional School in Brooklyn is bustling with students, activities, plants and promise.

Since last fall, the formerly unused Northeast Regional School greenhouse, attached to the back of the school, has blossomed into the shiny hub of an authentic, project-based curriculum that extrapolates greenhouse issues into relevant lessons about history, English, math, science, the work-a-day world and public service. The NRS project is aligned with applicable Connecticut curriculum standards.

"The entire curriculum for these high-schoolers has been designed around their greenhouse with agriculture as the prevailing theme," said Nancy Vitale, EASTCONN's Curriculum Specialist. Vitale helped write NRS's project-based curriculum, which is based on the principles and concepts of the School Redesign Network at Stanford University.

For example, Vitale said that NRS students use math to calculate how much area, topsoil, seed and fertilizer they need, while learning about world history by studying other cultures

to see how agriculture is tied to a country's economy. In science, students examine the use of pesticides, hybrid seeds and planting, as well as working on basic botany and greenhouse management. As part of the literature component, students keep journals and will read books about different cultures and the natural world, said Vitale.

"This is really a neat model that we have here," said Kimberly Kelly, the UConn Cooperative Extension Service agent who helped create the gardening side of the NRS greenhouse project. Kelly is also Windham County's Educational Outreach Coordinator. Kelly teaches NRS students all about the greenhouse, its uses and its possibilities.

This spring, with the devoted assistance of science instructor Kevin Segar, NRS students grew and sold spring flowers they had cultivated in the greenhouse.

"We really want it to be dynamic," said Kelly, who added that they are still developing the hands-on greenhouse project.

"Not only are students learning about nutrition, shopping skills and cooking lessons," said Kelly, "they're also growing the lettuce, garlic, snow peas and produce that is being used in the cooking lessons."

The greenhouse program has received support from UConn's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), which has allowed the school to incorporate Family and Consumer Science content standards into the curriculum, according to Robyn Incera, an NRS math teacher.

"An end product of the greenhouse [program] is an operational business plan to be used in future years," said Incera.

Kelly said that NRS students will participate in People's Harvest, a sustainable agriculture site at Wolf Den Park in Pomfret, which deals with issues of food and food security.

"The students will take the seedlings they've grown in the greenhouse and transplant them for the People's Harvest as part of their community service component," said Kelly.



Tender new lettuce plants thrive under student care at Northeast Regional School's revitalized greenhouse.

"One of the great aspects of this project is that students will work with professionals from the community within the context of the greenhouse, learning gardening skills and interpersonal communication, all of which is a crucial part of authentic and relevant, project-based instruction," said Vitale.

The final objective of the NRS greenhouse project is to help students develop life skills that they can use in the community after they graduate, said Vitale.

To learn more about this project, and authentic, relevant, project-based curricula, contact EASTCONN's Nancy Vitale at 860-455-0707, or via e-mail at nvitale@eastconn.org.

in eastern Connecticut classrooms and ease teachers' "science anxiety."

In surveys, elementary-level teachers have said they feel that science is their weakest subject area.

"Elementary teachers are jacks of all trades and they're fantastic at what they do," said Mary Lou Smith, a member of EASTCONN's Science Cadre. "But in the same way that a lot of people have math anxiety, many of these teachers also have science anxiety. We can help with that." Smith specializes in science at the elementary-school level.

EASTCONN's Science Cadre was formed last year by staff that are experts in elementary, middle- and high-school core science curricula. The Cadre includes Smith, Grace Levin, Nancy Magnani and Peter Landry.

"We're working proactively to figure out what teachers need and designing our professional development around that," said Smith. She and Magnani are among a select number of science teachers in the state who've been trained by the CSDE to train other educators on the NAEP assessment tool.

"The great thing is that once teachers are familiar with the science components of the NAEP, they will understand what is expected on the CMT science test," said Smith. "We use the NAEP as a model, so teachers can get a better understanding of what the science CMTs look like."

Ultimately, Smith said EASTCONN's Science Cadre has a clear goal:

"In the end, students must be comfortable asking questions and searching for answers," said Smith. "They have to learn how to observe and put value on their observations. We've got to get students to think and ask questions and be better problem-solvers in real-world situations. Science is about observing the world around us so we can make it a better place for ourselves."

Future EASTCONN professional development activities that will help teachers broaden their scientific know-how include topics like: *Developing Scientifically Literate Children* (Sept. 28th); *Sound: It's More than Music* (Oct. 12th); *Electronic Sensors for the Science Classroom* (Oct. 17th); *Teaching Science Process Skills* (Dec. 11th); and *Examining the Earth Beneath Us: Soils, Rocks and Minerals* (Jan. 8, 2008).

In addition, EASTCONN's Science Cadre plans other winter/spring 2008 professional development on topics like: assessments in science, non-fiction reading and writing strategies, the solar system, Grade-level Learning Expectations (GLEs), inquiry science in the pre-K-2 classroom and differentiated instruction in the science classroom.

The Science Cadre can provide schools with a variety of customized, on-site, in-district science trainings and support, curriculum alignment, instructional strategies, assessment strategies and CMT science preparation.

Learn how EASTCONN's science experts can help districts adjust their science curricula and prepare for the science CMTs, by contacting Mary Lou Smith at 860-455-0707, or e-mail her at msmith@eastconn.org.

To learn more about EASTCONN's science workshops, visit www.eastconn.org and click on Workshops.

Thomas F. Cronin Named Director of Education Services



EASTCONN has named Thomas F. Cronin its new Director of Education Services.

"I'm very excited about this new opportunity," said Cronin, who has been EASTCONN's Director of Student Services since last August. [Editor's Note: See the story on Cronin in the November 2006 *Connections*.]

EASTCONN Education Services will provide direct services to school-age students and adults (with the exception of young children and their families, whose services fall under the auspices of EASTCONN's Early Childhood Initiatives division).

"As Director of Education Services, I will continue to champion the fine work and initiatives in our school programs, while also lending my support to EASTCONN's Adult and Community Services," Cronin said.

Contact Cronin at 860-455-0707, or by e-mail at tcronin@eastconn.org.



AT Demand is on the Rise

High-stakes tests and a keen desire to enhance student learning have sent a growing number of school districts to EASTCONN's Assistive Technology services to improve student outcomes.

Districts are already making arrangements to use EASTCONN's AT services for the 2007-2008 school year, said Carol Magliocco, EASTCONN's Related Services and Assistive Technology Consultant.

Districts are interested in an array of consultative, student assessment, professional development and capacity-building AT services, said Magliocco.

"AT training during Common Curriculum days is in especially high demand for next year," said Magliocco.

"The mandates of IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act], as well as NCLB [No Child Left Behind] have expanded schools' recognition of the need to provide AT to help students succeed," she said.

"Plus, there are very few people available to provide Assistive Technology in the state of Connecticut," said Magliocco, which helps explain why AT services are at such a premium.

Driven by demanding tests like Connecticut's CMTs and CAPTs, there has been a national trend toward using Assistive Technology to help struggling students achieve positive results in the classroom, particularly in the areas of reading and writing, said Magliocco.

To learn more about the EASTCONN's Assistive Technology services, contact Carol Magliocco at 860-455-0707, or e-mail her at cmagliocco@eastconn.org.

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EASTCONN's Director of Technology Solutions and Teaching and Learning. "It's also about building a lot of high-quality professional development for writing instruction as well as creating cross-district professional learning communities."

EASTCONN will provide professional development as part of the technology and writing-assessment grants.

EASTCONN developed the technology grants along with Region 19, Windham and Coventry, and assisted Stafford with the fourth.

For more information about the CSDE technology and writing grant, contact Jim Huggins at 860-455-0707, or via e-mail at jhuggins@eastconn.org.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE, continued from page 3

programs with top-notch speakers — all in a local setting so professionals can obtain requisite CEUs without traveling great distances.

"I think there is a tremendous need for this resource and our colleagues seem to agree," Chretien said. "We want people to look to EASTCONN as the source for CEUs for these topics — without traveling to Boston or Hartford. We're here to help build a program of education and training in this area," said Chretien, adding, "We also want to partner with schools to increase licensure opportunities for Related Services providers."

"We're striving to meet the needs of the professionals out there," Chretien said.

For information, call Mary Jo Chretien at 860-455-0707 or e-mail her at mchretien@eastconn.org.

New On www.eastconn.org

- **CMT Reporter** allows schools to combine CMT results with current class data. Click on Technology Solutions.
- New Web page: **Waves of History**. Click on Interdistricts, then go to Waves of History.
- New on **SBLC** (Click on Teaching & Learning, then SBLC button):
 - **Child Safety and Crisis Response**
 - **Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices** by Ralph Fletcher
 - **The Gender Gap** — Listen to a podcast of an interview with Kathy Stevens, co-author of this article.
 - **THE SPOTLIGHT**
 - Adolescent Literacy
 - From State Policy to Classroom Practice: Improving Literacy Instruction for All Students
 - Making Writing Instruction a Priority in America's Middle and High Schools.
 - Reading Next

■ New *e-Connections* Newsletter

Register for EASTCONN's new electronic newsletter by visiting www.eastconn.org. Click on:

Register for the *e-Connections* Newsletter

Once you've registered, expect to receive periodic e-newsletters from EASTCONN starting this fall. Called *e-Connections*, our electronic newsletter will deliver the latest education news from eastern Connecticut right to your e-mail address.

EASTCONN's Pledge to You:
We will never share your contact information.



376 Hartford Turnpike ~ Hampton, Connecticut 06247
860-455-0707 ~ www.eastconn.org

EASTCONN, one of six Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) in Connecticut, has been serving the educational and training needs of schools, organizations, and individuals of all ages in northeastern Connecticut since 1980.

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